

ABOUT MUSIC

JIMnI

Recorded at Point A Studios on Finley Point, by Stacy Santilli and Troy Ricciardi; mixed by Santilli; and mastered by Nathan Zavalney, Missoula Soundworks, Missoula, MT, 2012

The self-titled debut CD from Polson duo JIMnI, featuring Stacy Lynne Santilli and Jim Steiner, has been a long time in the works, and the wait was well worth it. The two musicians have performed together for 10 years in various bands and always found themselves making music together. They wanted to put something down that was original, and Steiner's 13 self-penned songs fit the bill.

The CD features sparse production that never gets in the way of Santilli's soaring vocals and Steiner's warm, baritone pipes. Santilli also plays piano and tambourine, and Steiner's excellent guitar fretwork anchors his tunes. Guest artists are Troy Ricciardi on steel guitar and Jen Slayden on cello.

The moody "Thief of Hearts" (with lyrics by Steiner's wife, Brenda) starts us off with Santilli's rich, expressive alto leading the way. Ricciardi plays cool, fuzzed-up steel licks and Santilli has spot-on inflections, a ton of control and a fine, husky sound.

Terrific, bold cello from Slayden underpins the next song, "Don't Look Back." The spooky harmonies the duo sings show they are well-matched and tight, and Steiner's emotional lead brings depth. Although Santilli could easily overpower this one, the sound is understated and just right.

"Rusted Crosses," inspired by the crosses along Highway 93, opens slowly with a bluesy, almost ominous feel. Steiner's adept guitar work and harmonica lead the way on a tune that morphs into trouble at 3 a.m.: "The reaper man's been here too many years in a row." Way-cool bent vocal notes from both singers here!

Santilli begs her lover to forgive with long, sad tones in "For You"; she also plays expressive piano on the pretty, bittersweet "Pictures," inspired by an exhibit of Pulitzer Prize-winning photos. The unison harmony of Steiner and Santilli is a nice touch on the chorus ("Some people don't try at all ... some people don't give a damn ...").

"Bring 'Em Home" features Steiner singing lead on a ballad with political undertones, and "Kiss My Ass" is a Dylan-esque story poem, replete with harmonica and Steiner's pleading vocal, about a woman, according to notes, "who's had just about enough." Once again, they cook on their complementary vocal style here, and the zinger of a last verse is great!

There's a lot more to the album, and good production lets the artists shine at what they do best.

Visit JIMnI at www.reverbnation.com/jimnilive, or www.facebook.com/jimnimusic.

— Mariss McTucker



Dodgy Mountain Men: Stronger Than Death

Engineered, mixed and produced by Brandon Zimmer at Studio 1015; mastered by Jason Hicks, Missoula, MT, 2012

The Dodgy Mountain Men, a quartet of Missoula musicians, recently finished a cross-country tour to promote their first CD to purvey what they call a "home-brewed Montana stomprgrass that goes down smooth but packs a bite."

Sort of like moonshine, their raw sound grows on you with its old-time mix of bluegrass and early frontier music. They credit Bob Dylan and the Grateful Dead as influences, among others, yet the string band nuances bring out the Americana in their tunes. (Rockacana?)

The group consists of vocalist/guitarist and harp player Eric "Boss" Bostrom; Jed Nussbaum on vocals, mandolin, and guitar; Scott Howard on electric bass; and Clyde C. Netzey IV on tablas, or Indian hand drums. Producer Brandon Zimmer also plays djembe, a larger hand drum, on one number, "Sleep When I'm Dead." The addition of the Indian percussion adds an inventive dimension to the band's rustic sound.

Principal songwriters are Nussbaum and Bostrom, but the whole band adds input to these 12 originals. There's an old country flavor to the first piece, "Down That Road," with its fast-chuckin' guitar chords and gravelly vocals; it features a snappy mando break from Nussbaum.

"Sleep When I'm Dead ('rest when I'm dyin') opens with Bostrom's mournful harmonica, segueing into a fast tempo and cool unison singing.



Both Nussbaum and Bostrom possess growly, authentic pipes, and the singers spit out the lyrics to each tune as if it's the last time they'll sing them. That gives the songs an edge that stays true to the album's title. Indeed, many of the compositions dance around the topic of death, fleshing out the theme. The tabla tastefully underpins the tunes, where heavy drums could overpower the mood.

"State of Minor" is a trembly, jumpy instrumental full of spooky chords. There's rockin' counterpoint of guitar and mando, propelling an exotic south-of-the-border sound. "Jackie," a tale of notoriety, revenge and murder, has country-folk stylings and a great squiggly guitar solo with Brian Setzer nuances.

There's almost a Middle-Eastern sound to "Montana Storms," which has Mick Jagger inflections in the vocals as well – a nice touch.

The swampy finger-snapper "Hell Thru a Bullet Hole" might be a favorite. The classic tale of western revenge is steeped in American history, has a cool melody and riffs, and tells a great story of a man tracking down a corrupt sheriff.

The love song, "Written," is a jazzy concoction; and in the galloping finale, "Ol' Calamity," fires are burning up farmers' crops.

Plenty here to listen to. A lot of the music rushes along at the same frenetic pace, but the storytelling makes it thoughtful, and the lead playing is interesting. Uncluttered production adds to the genuine flavor, too. Visit www.dodgymountainmen.com.

— Mariss McTucker

Perry and the Pumpers: Movin' at Midnight

Produced 2012 by Steve Ehrmann and Philip Aaberg; sequenced, mixed and mastered by Aaberg at The Bin in Chester, MT

Philip Aaberg could easily be called the "hardest working man in Montana show business" because of the numerous recordings, live music performances, radio programs and lectures he is involved with. In addition, he finds time to produce other artists' work, such as Jack Gladstone's *Native Anthropology* and the two-CD jazz compilation, *A Night at the Ozark*. It seems nothing is outside his creative grasp.

So, we come to the latest output from his recording studio, The Bin, located in Chester. Perry and The Pumpers' *Movin' At Midnight* delivers good-times blues and rock 'n roll, with a rolling-rollicking groove for everyday Montana working men and women. It really doesn't matter that this latest Aaberg album was partly recorded in California or that some of the musicians hail from the Golden State – this is great Montana bar music.

Perry and the Pumpers was Aaberg's first music gig after the Montana native attended Harvard, and then left college for California.

"I was new in the Bay Area and looking for work playing music and I saw an ad in the *Rolling Stone* that said, 'Band needs keyboard player,'" recalls Aaberg.

The band was Perry and the Pumpers and, after auditioning, he ended up playing with them at a club in the North Beach area of San Francisco. "I stayed a long time – it was like going to school in rock 'n roll and the blues," Aaberg says.

The pianist finally left to join Elvin Bishop's band, having met Bishop when the blues rocker used to sit in with Perry and the Pumpers when he wasn't on the road.

Perry and the Pumpers is made up of Aaberg on piano and accordion, Perry Welsh, lead vocals and harmonica, Paul Revelli, drums and percussion, Steve Ehrmann, bass, and various guitar players sitting in, including Bishop on lead guitar on a couple of songs.

Aaberg's son, Michael, joins the group on Hammond organ on the rousing title track. This father/son duo also played together on a couple tracks on the *Night at the Ozark* CD.

Welsh's great baritone, though, is the band's stock-in-trade, lending itself to these blues and rock tunes. He sounds smooth as butter on the opening track, "Roberta." With a guitar solo by Bishop, this is great dance-hall music.

The album sparkles with blues tunes such as "Ain't That Just Like a Woman" and early rock 'n roll gems like "Hey Little Girl," a Zydeco-flavored arrangement that features Aaberg on accordion.

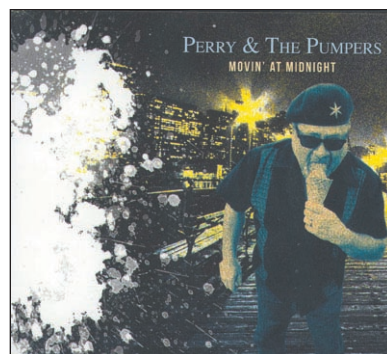
The rock 'n roll classic, "Mess Around," took me right back to the days of the Palace Hotel in Missoula. The song also features some barrelhouse piano runs by Aaberg, who sounds a lot like Jerry Lee Lewis. This is great roots music.

My favorite is "If You Love Me Like You Say," which includes some classic honkin' tenor saxophone riffs by Bay Area sax-woman Nancy Wright. Bar-walkin' and honkin', the way it ought to be – shades of Big Man Clarence Clemons of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band.

My advice: pick up this CD, plunk it on the player, open your windows and doors and invite the neighbors in for some house-rockin', good-time dance music.

Learn more at www.sweetgrassmusic.com.

— Wilbur Rehmann



State of the Arts welcomes CDs

State of the Arts welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or Lively Times, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.

